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SUBJECT: PM TRIES TO CALM SUCCESSION FEARS; INSISTS AMIR AND CROWN PRINCE WILL REMAIN IN POSITIONS

REF: KUWAIT 4264 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Matthew H. Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary and comment: In an effort to silence continued speculation over succession, Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in a November 22 interview, firmly dismissed the possibility that either the Amir or the Crown Prince, both in poor health, would step down from their positions. Other Kuwaiti officials, including the National Assembly Speaker and the Ambassador to the United Kingdom, quickly backed his statements. PM Shaykh Sabah also paid a rare visit to National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the leading member of the Salem branch and a vocal family critic. National Assembly members' (MPs) recent appeal for a resolution of the succession issue appears to have prompted the Prime Minister's comments. Some observers have argued, however, that PM Shaykh Sabah's insistence on the Crown Prince remaining in his position is unconstitutional. Critics (accurately) point out that the Succession Law stipulates the Crown Prince be removed from office when he can no longer perform his official duties.

¶12. (C) PM Shaykh Sabah's recent statements, while unlikely to completely silence public speculation on succession, indicate the Al-Sabah's preference for letting "nature take its course," as one ruling family member recently confided to Poloff. Salem family members may still chafe at control by the Jaber lineage of key political positions, but are significantly weakened and unable to alter the current distribution of power, as evidenced by statements attributed to Shaykh Salem Al-Ali in support of the Prime Minister. End summary and comment.

Government Message: Amir and CP Will Remain in Positions

¶13. (SBU) In response to mounting criticism of the ruling family's dispute over succession, Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah firmly stated that the "icons of the ruling family will stay and won't be replaced by anyone as long as they are alive" in a November 22 interview with the Arabic-daily Al-Seyassah. Leading government officials quickly echoed his statements. National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi confirmed that "the Crown Prince will stay in his place and there are no intentions for the ruling family to change that," local media reported November 27. He added, "We have declared allegiance to the Al-Sabah family...and there are no differences whatsoever regarding the relationship with the ruling family."

¶14. (SBU) Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK, Khaled Al-Duwaisan, also highlighted the "unique and important social contract" between the Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people during a November 25 seminar. Almost daily pictures in local newspapers of the

Crown Prince meeting with top government officials have further underscored the illusion that he continues to perform his official duties. (Note: Such pictures were rarely published before the Crown Prince returned from medical treatment in London on October 19 amidst renewed public debate over succession. End note.)

¶15. (C) During a November 27 meeting on other issues, the Ambassador queried Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah on the public debate on succession and the Prime Minister's calls for unity and comments that the matter had been resolved. Al-Jarallah asserted that PM Shaykh Sabah expressed the "spirit of the Kuwaiti people" when he said that there is no such thing as a "former Crown Prince" or a "former Amir."

PM Visits Outspoken, and Apparently Bested, Family Critic

¶16. (SBU) In an apparent attempt to smooth over family differences, PM Shaykh Sabah met November 22 with National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, whose call for the creation of a three-member committee to assist in ruling the country touched off the most recent controversy over succession and publicly aired ruling family divisions over future leadership (reftel). Local media reported that "sources close to the ruling family" said Shaykh Salem Al-Ali appreciated the Prime Minister's efforts to end "needless talk in the country and the region." Shaykh Salem Al-Ali also reportedly told PM Shaykh Sabah in a telephone conversation, "May Almighty Allah bless you for your great efforts to unite the family. You have succeeded in confining the affairs of the ruling family to its members and prevented them from being discussed publicly." (Comment: It is telling

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that these statements were not attributed to Shaykh Salem Al-Ali directly.)

Parliamentary Pressure Prompts PM Shaykh Sabah,s Comments

¶17. (SBU) National Assembly members, impassioned appeals for a resolution of the succession issue likely prompted PM Shaykh Sabah's recent comments. During the National Assembly's November 15 session, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager appealed to the Amir "to swiftly resolve the crisis." He added, "What is happening is not in the interest of the family or Kuwait. Compromise within the family will stabilize the country." Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, and State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Mohammed Dhifallah Sharar said, "The situation of the royal family disturbs the stability of the nation." Moderate Islamist Shi'a MP Hussein Al-Qallaf added, "We need decisive decisions to resolve the situation, which is neither healthy or appropriate."

Not Everyone Convinced

¶18. (SBU) Some observers have argued that PM Shaykh Sabah's insistence that the Crown Prince remain in his position is unconstitutional. Al-Sager, despite his appeals for a speedy resolution, said November 26, "I differ with Shaykh Sabah as the Succession Law stipulates how the Amir and Crown Prince would step down in certain circumstances and the law...prevails." In a November 26 article in the Arabic-daily Al-Qabas, liberal lawyer and columnist Imad Saif wrote that the Prime Minister's statements "clash with the constitution....The recent position of Shaykh Sabah on the affairs of the ruling house contributes considerably to freezing the process of change and development and the launching of a comprehensive political reform process." In the same issue, liberal lawyer and columnist, Abdul Latif Al-Duaj, wrote, "The statements by Shaykh Sabah did not only

include freezing or suspending the Succession Law, but went beyond the acceptable or even the debatable."

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